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6 December 1978

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. Walter Slocombe  
Director, DoD Salt Task Force

SUBJECT : Reservations on SALT Among Soviet  
Provincial Leaders (U)

FROM :   
National Foreign Assessment Center, CIA

REFERENCE : Your Note of 14 November 1978

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1. Our evidence that some provincial leaders in the Soviet policymaking elite may have reservations on the need to conclude a SALT II agreement is admittedly tenuous and based largely on heavily edited published speeches. (U)

2. We have drawn inferences, in particular, from the contrasting approaches to detente exhibited in speeches delivered this year by certain key leaders at the center (Kosygin, Andropov, and Ustinov) and by their Politburo colleagues in the provinces (Shcherbitskiy, Romanov, and Masherov). (U)

-- The centrally based leaders have given a basically positive assessment of detente despite "contradictions" in the US-Soviet relationship, suggesting that detente has deep roots and should become (if it has not already) "irreversible".

-- The provincial leaders, however, have avoided positive references to detente, alluding vaguely to a need for peace and disarmament. In some cases--Romanov, for instance, on June 16--tough words on the need for vigilance and heightened defense preparedness further undermine the already dubious neutrality of the leader's position on the issue.

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3. We believe that the provincial leaders express such reservations on detente--and implicitly on the need for or the urgency of concluding a SALT agreement--primarily because they reflect the bias of a basically unenlightened and uninvolved parochial Communist Party organization in their respective bailiwicks. (U)

4. In private these leaders may take a more statesman-like approach to the issue, as Masherov evidently did when he met with the visiting US senators in Minsk last month. In our view, confidential or "frank" discussions with foreigners do not necessarily reveal the individual Soviet leaders's true position on the policy issues under discussion. We assume, for example, that Masherov and other leaders who met with members of the senatorial delegation spoke about SALT within clearly specified Politburo guidelines. (U)

5. Unfortunately, as you undoubtedly are aware, there is very little persuasive evidence on the actual views of Soviet policymakers on these matters. According to one plausible account that appeared in Soviet emigre circles a few years ago, former Ukrainian party leader Petr Shelest voiced last-minute opposition to the SALT I summit in Moscow in May 1972. His argument probably was forceful in the Soviet context, since the US had just begun bombing North Vietnam and mining Haiphong Harbor. He was, however, immediately demoted and later removed from all positions of power, serving as an example of the great political risk involved in such opposition against leadership consensus. This lesson no doubt has not been lost on other provincial leaders, who may in fact be even more constrained in expressing reservations about the current consensus on reaching a SALT II agreement, precisely because of the 1972 precedent. (U)

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